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THE WATER COLOR EXHIBITION.

BY MARY GAY HUMPHREYS.

THE Water Color Exhibition has, for some time, enjoyed the reputation of being the most agreeable exhibition of the year. There is something joyous in the quality of water color. It is light, frank, and much less capable of affectation than oils. We are on good terms with it, so to say a *l'outrance*. Added to this, care is always taken to make the surroundings harmonious and agreeable, and we surrender at once to the pleasant impression. This year the decorations are even more noteworthy than usual. Mr. A. A. Anderson, to whom they are responsible, has lavished them with free hand, and if they contribute to making the exhibition more popular, the Water Color Society will scarcely regard its bronze dragons, rich stuffs, and overshadowing palms as rivals of the pictures.

The Hanging Committee has also considered the ensemble of the rooms and done its part toward producing picturesque effect. In each room the lighter paintings are grouped together and the color carried forward, the deeper richer tones being massed at the opposite end of the room. In the south and east rooms the result of this hanging is very striking, but not so noticeable in the other rooms.

The general estimate of the exhibition is, that while it does not equal in interest other exhibitions perhaps, its excellence is more evenly distributed, a greater number of canvases show better mastery of material. Several accustomed names are absent, as those of Abbey, Blum, Smedley, and Lungren, while others are unexpectedly present, as that of Samuel Colman.

The differences in schools between the younger and older water color painters, were never more marked, and at no previous exhibition has each justified its method more ably. There are no Curriers to stimulate discussion. Mr. Frederick Freer returns again with his favorite model, in company with Mr. W. H. Lippincott, modeling life size heads in transparent colors, works of interest, but not firebrands as were his beeches. Mr. Winslow Homer sends no more studies, such as a few years ago divided the house against itself.

The work goes on but everything is decorous, harmonious. So evident is the good feeling that the Hanging Committee having nothing serious to be accounted for, has given play to its spirits and organized a special exhibition of humorous works in the corridor. On no other ground than a high flow of spirits can we account for the admission of the anatomical Venus and Tannhauser of Mr. W. F. Walter, the St. Cecilia from the same hand, and the Song of the Sea by Mr. Wm. Wallace Scott.

Not only is it pleasant thus to see brethren dwell in unity, but these works have at least the merit of tickling the eye if they do not feed the imagination.

An exhibition so equal in excellence affords but little occasion for comment, especially since the mention of names immediately suggests the character of the works to which they are signed. To be more specific is simply to enlarge on the catalogue.

The principal work shown by virtue of size and position is The Puritan Girl, by Mr. J. Alden Weir, a life size three-quarter figure. Except for the qualities of the work, the feeling of the medium and certain peculiarities in handiwork not altogether creditable, the painting has the appearance of an illustration. One can conceive it as intended for some supplemental number of an illustrated weekly.

The resemblance is superficial. It is, in fact, a painstaking, if not an ambitious work. Although it does not appeal to the sympathies, and one is accustomed to find some such demand in Mr. Weir's work aside from its technical excellence.

The two men who give greatest interest to the exhibition are Mr. Winslow Homer and Mr. F. S. Church. The public demand on artists is not only that they know how to speak, but that they have something to say. This differs somewhat from the artistic standpoint, which is apt to regard the manner rather than the matter as important to consider the means out of relation to the end. Both Mr. Homer and Mr. Church have something to say—something of interest—and which no one can say as well as themselves. They have that double gift, originality, both in matter and manner. These are possessions so rare that we scarcely know how to estimate them.

Mr. Homer sends two works. One recalls, in some measure, his work of last year. A group of fisher girls are seen through a mist standing by a boat, and on the shore of a

sea lashed into foam. On the other side of the boat are the forms of men dimly outlined. The girls show the same noble types Mr. Homer made familiar in previous works, and the composition repeats the same effective repetition of lines. That which is peculiar to this work is the atmospheric phase and the feeling rather than the perception of the wild weather.

The second painting is in the same way, conveys feeling rather than literally admits certain facts. The feeling is of action, powerful and effective. The heads of three men are seen above the waves, now close to the shore, which will soon receive both them and their upturned boat. Although the bodies of the men are submerged, one feels through the water the sense of struggle of strong arms and legs in motion. To render the seen is work for the artist, but to render the unseen with all the force of actual vision is a more difficult task, and it is this which Mr. Homer has achieved.

To turn to Mr. Church from the sternness of the life which Mr. Homer indicates, is to enter the domain of enchantment, of which Mr. Church alone has the key. Never was the birth of the musquito more poetically celebrated than in the Pandora which he exhibits this year. Over a glassy sea, green and full of color as a beryl, floats Pandora's box. It is full of little monsters, struggling to escape, while she, a lovely figure, kneeling on the box, strives to press it down, her eye following the train escaping in a curling filmy cloud. The face is in profile, one of those delicate, sensitive, half unearthly types which we may now associate with Mr. Church's work. The face is particularly lovely in feature, and its naive and poetically disturbed expression altogether delightful. In carrying out his idea nothing could be more deftly executed than the defining of these spirits of the air in the filmy cloud. These are not only made out with consummate finesse, but are each given, however faintly, some individual trait and attitude. In such work, apparently so light and spontaneous, there must be much thoughtful consideration and experiment. The ease with which he frees us from any participation in it must be accredited to the artist. The color of the work, its harmony of pinks and greens, corresponds with the delicacy of humor and sentiment, and finishes the sense of its completeness. It will be noticed also how much more satisfactory Mr. Church uses his body color in the Pandora of this exhibition.

The two young Morans, frequently and bountifully as they exhibit, have always the merit of unexpectedness. To put it justly, no one knows what they will do next. The more permanent value in their work depends more on the standpoint from which one regards it. Whatever they do is undeniably clever, perilously clever. Looked upon as preparatory work, it seems part of an admirable system of study, the end of which is complete mastery of materials. The works which they exhibit this season tend more than ever to this view. These are a series of brilliant sketches in pure color, executed with a certain dainty brevity, and remarkably effective. The subjects are for the most part women of the Dresden china persuasion, outdoors in various bewitching positions, and a more elaborate work is a Vidette Mounted, by Percy Moran. Older men might be more content to have done work which so completely and with such precision accomplishes all it was meant to do. But in the case of these young men the question remains, will they be content with this studio work, admirable as it is, or are we to expect from them something more personal, more directly the outcome of their own feeling and experience?

Since the exhibition a few years since, when the oranges rolling out of the paper, by Miss Kate Greatorex, from its place on high, called attention to the force and vigor of her work, until now, when her "Incense" is conspicuously placed on the line, everything she has done has confirmed the intimation of that first work. While her brush has lost none of its swift boldness, her composition and sense of decorative effect, which more than imitation of textures, gives value to still life painting, have sensibly increased. In these respects, and certainly in the last, she stands almost alone, even remembering Mr. Alden Weir. "Incense" is a mass of yellow roses, heaped by an overturned brass pot, a melody of yellow, if you will.

The flower painting of the Exhibition is uncommonly good. Miss Abbott returns with a large bowl of chrysanthemums, which each year she varies with renewed charm. There is especial freshness in the wild roses of A. C. Newill, and the two buds, with reflections in the polished slab on which they lay, by M. E. C. Reed, is one of the most skillful bits of painting in the room.

Mr. Alfred Kappes' contributions are all clever character studies, done with great freedom and

directness. Aunt Saphira is eloquent as to her back, and the various sketches of negro life, as far as they go, are admirable. There is a fitting antithesis in manner between these works and the Cymbal Player of Mr. Frank Millet. There may be a little over-elaborateness in Mr. Millet's technique, but it errs on the right side. There is fine feeling which underlies the peculiar color of the dress and the wreathed head, and it is to be remarked in each new work by Mr. Millet how far he is carrying his researches outside of the usual range of color. This is archaic, as are his subjects.

The same peculiarity of color distinguish in the beach and stranded boat of Mr. Homer Martin, which was noticed in his recent works in oil, though not to so marked a degree. He also exhibits some delicate transcripts of Normandy landscape. Mr. William Magrath, so long absent, is represented by some foreign architectural views of merit, but wanting that human charm so conspicuous in his early works. Every one must also welcome again Mr. Samuel Colman in several views with water, distinguished by his usual refinement of color and handling. Mr. Colman is one with Mr. Wood, Mr. Farrer, Mr. W. T. Richards and Mr. H. P. Smith in sustaining the conscientiousness and faithful, if not reverential work of the olden men against the more dashing methods of the later school, and the exhibition substantially shows that their appreciation by the public is not lessened.

There is only space to mention the fidelity of the New England Elm and its merry group, by Mr. J. Wells Champney, and his still more interesting study of the Girl in Brown; Miss Stone's happy bit of child life, and the group of little women, by Mrs. Conant. Mr. Harry Chase sends several brilliant sketches of coast-life, and Mr. W. M. Chase a Study off the Dutch Coast. Mr. Arthur Quartley exhibits a study of Hayricks, and Mr. Bruce Crane a Winter Scene, particularly good in the reflection of the leaden sky on the snow.

Mr. Hugh Newill cannot interest one in the views of maidenhood, he attempts by such unlovely types, unless he adds greater interest to his technique. Mr. Walter Satterlee's Sketches of monastic life are unusually interesting. Mr. Maynard is still investigating the charms of bric-a-brac. Mr. Thomas Moran fills one end of the east room with the atmospheric qualities of Mexico, and there are two excellent Basterts near by.

THE picture of chrysanthemums, by Abbott F. Graves, which has appeared in the studio scene in "Esmeralda," shows a novel design in the frame designed by the artist. This is formed from rough pine boards bronzed. On one side is a pair of shears attached flatly to the frame in connection with a bunch of grasses and tufts dipped in plaster, and gilded. At the lower corner of the opposite side is fastened against the flat surface a spray of chrysanthemums gilded in like manner, a very small cluster of the same being placed near the corner above.

THE New York Decorative Art Society has on exhibition a screen contributed by Miss Hall of Boston, which has met with general admiration. Its three panels of bamboo cloth form the ground for painted designs of grapes, apples, and gourds. The framing in polished oak shows at top and bottom carved panels with intaglio design of bamboo plant starting from the lower edge. This is left dull in the cutting which thus shades finely into the tone of the cloth, with an artistic rather than a magnificent effect.

SUCH has become the demand for decorative iron work that a department of iron manufacture in its artistic forms is about to be opened by the Boston Household Art Company, whose recent importations of foreign productions of this class include specially interesting varieties. An old Italian candelabrum which, standing on the floor, spreads its seven branches above the heads of persons of ordinary height, is a finely-wrought piece; another handsome work is a copper lamp from Nuremburg which is hung by chains.

AMONG novelties brought by Mr. McCarthy from Vienna and elsewhere, is that of a paper weight in the form of a brass glove deftly modeled and the top turned over carelessly at the wrist. A clock designed by one of the employees of this establishment has the works within the body of a brazen eagle figured on a plush covered shield, the cherished term "heraldic" being used to name the style.

